18

DESCRIPTION

OF FOUR CAPITAL PICTURES

BY TITIAN

After the Cantos of Petrarch

STILED

THE TRIUMPHS OF TIME, OF FAME, OF RELIGION, & OF DEATH.

Douce
FF. 171.

DESCRIPTION

OF FOUR CAPITAL PICTURES

THE TRIUMPH OF TIME,

OR RATHER

OF SCIENCE.

THe ſcope theſe ſubjects afforded to repreſent a number of figures, all intereſted in telling the ſtory, was probably what induc'd our Artiſt to prefer them as worthy of his pencil; which from the life & ſpirit that has guided it, has far ſurpaſs'd the Poet's pen; manifeſtly evincing the excellence of the Painter's art, who ſets the objects immediately before your eyes, whereas the Poet only helps you to imagine them.

Our Artiſt ſets out with an improvement which promiſes that ſuperiority he has preſerv'd thrô the whole performance. ſor Petrarch has rather made of his Canto the lamentation than the Triumph of Time; repreſenting him only as indignant & vex'd, that in ſpite of the fatal power of his Scythe, ever sweeping off the human race, yet by their ſcience they evade his deſtruction, & ſtill more gloriously, in memory, ſurvive. On this hint, Titian has improv'd the thought by giving us the Triumph of Science; and has finely imagin'd the Apotheoſis of a Mathematician, whoſe knowledge by its certainty will ever remain unchangeable, & is beſt ſuited accordingly to immortalize its inventors. A generation of Mankind is marching, as it were, thrô life beneath this moſt reſpectable figure; who being

intended to denote the ſurviving dignity of human nature, moves not in the proceſſion, but ſeems riſing upon wings of that ſublime expanſion as plainly bring the heavens within their ſoaring.

For the firſt objects of his deſcription our Artiſt has choſen the two extremities of life, the Entrance & Exit; The firſt & ſecond infancy. a moſt expreſſive figure of imbecility in an old man, ſcarcely ſupporting himſelf on two ſticks, has before him an Infant ſtretching out his arm, with a puerile impatience to take one of them from him, in order to beat a tambour that he holds in the other hand; at the ſame time another Boy is pushing the old gentleman from behind, as if to make him room. By which emblem the Painter meant to ſignifye the decay & recruit of the ſpecies: As if the human nature, with that of the snake, ſtill ſurviv'd in the new coating, which ever on growing push'd off the old one. There is another happy uſe made of the hindmoſt boy that will be notic'd in its place.

The next ſtage of life that our Painter-Poet has repreſented in its due order, is that wherein, thô the ſtrength of body be ſomewhat impair'd, the vigor of the mind remains entire. And this he has ſignified, with the utmoſt preciſion, in the two Senators who preceed the old man. You almoſt hear, as well as ſee, that the outermoſt has ſtated a propoſition to the inner one, to which this latter gives his mature & moſt deliberate aſſent. nor could the weighty act of council, the peculiar attribute of the Age thus repreſented, receive a more lively & forcible expreſſion.

The ſtation of life that follows, is that of a Man in the full vigor of it; when the mind & Body both enjoy their utmoſt ſtrength. And this is repreſented in the hale figure that comes next after the old Gentleman. This manly Type of our moſt perfect ſtate, with looks at once ſenſible & pleaſant, denotes the happy circumſtance of this age, as not remov'd from pleaſure, thô with ſteadineſs for buſineſs. To expreſs one eſſential duty in this ſtate of Manhood, our Moraliſt has shewn him to be Pater-Familias, by the happy uſe hinted at of the Boy that pushes out the old Man; who by a moſt evident family reſemblance, as well as by his poſition under the fatherly protection of this figure, is mark'd out plainly for his ſon. Both together forming a moſt expreſſive emblem of that Age of life, that requires Marriage to fulfill the conditions of it.

The remaining ſtate that I find in this elegant deſcription, is perhaps the moſt deſireable one; & has not conſequently been neglected by our ſagacious Artiſt. This is the Nubile Age, moſt charmingly ſet forth in the innocent, the modeſt, the beautifull figure of a Bride, attended by her Mother on her right, with the Bride-Maids, & relations in her ſuite. The Bridegroom is advanc'd a few ſteps, but ſtill turning to this groupe to shew his belonging to it. And

as this Age, moſt ſenſible of Love, is equally thirſting after Glory, our Author has exhibited his nuptial Heroe in the character of a Young warriour, & array'd him in a coat of mail.

Before theſe a fine groupe of two ſcepter'd Monarchs with attendants conveys a moſt ſublime ſentiment in a maſterly expreſſion. The Diadem on the head, with purſe & ſcepter in the hands of the moſt ancient & apparent figure, are meant to ſignifye, that neither honors, power, nor richeſs can avail to put by the fatal turn; the manifeſt poſſeſſor of them is even the firſt to make this inevitable exit. By the ſteady gait & unembaraſs'd countenance with which this Royal figure ſo wiſely accepts his fate, as well as by the dreſs, it ſeems intended for that of Solomon. The next is undoubtedly Alexander, who as He wept there were no more Worlds to conquer, so he ſeems to quit this with indignation, that He can no longer reak his vengeance on it.

There are two moſt ſignificant figures near the ſpoſal proceſſion; one with a cranium of ſome animal in his hand, from his obſervation on which He ſeems to be gathering ſome Augury, and another with an attention to him, moſt inimitably painted, that demonſtrates theſe Perſonages to be of conſequence in the compoſition. but whether they have reference to the nuptial ceremony, or tell ſome other part of this intereſting ſtory, I have not, to my great concern, been able to gueſs.

I cannot but mention here, what I ever lament, the great diſadvantage theſe mythologies, in painting particularly, lye under withont the Authors explanation. There is not one figure in this great work that has not its ſignificancy, or that ſerves merely to make up a number. in the colouring & deſign almoſt each one ſeems the capital figure; And yet many of theſe, as to their great meaning, are loſt, at leaſt to me, for want of this authentic record.

The moſt impertinent of Commentators had intruded into the very text of this great work his inſipid explanation, by inſcribing a name over every figure. Which evidence of his impudent ignorance is ſtill ſeen upon the prints that were taken from theſe pictures before they came into my poſſeſſion. but no ſooner had I purchaſed the paintings than I eras'd theſe miſnomers; convinc'd, as there could be no doubt of the originality of the pictures, that this inſertion was a baſe forgery. the eraſure confirm'd my opinion; for having ſcrap'd off the white letters we found the original tints under them. The expunging of theſe blaſphemous characters was not effected withont much labor & attention; but both were well beſtow'd; As, theſe falſe witneſſes remov'd, the pure & eloquent originals were now leſt to tell their own ſtory.

I muſt own however ſome aſſiſtance, even from theſe errors, in my ſearch after the intent & meaning of our Author. And poſ-

 ſibly

ſibly they gave me in ſome meaſure a clue that has conducted me ſafely, as far as I have hitherto penetrated, into this labyrinth. but however expreſſive our Poet has undoubtedly been, his thoughts are many of them lock'd up in this ſpecies of Hieroglyphic, which it will be difficult to diſcloſe entirely withont the Maſter's Key.

THE TRIUMPH OF FAME.

IF the Triumph of Science gave our Author so fair an occaſion to diſplay his talents, in adopting the figures of one compleat generation of the human ſpecies so well to tell his ſtory; He has no leſs maniſeſted his invention & taſte, in chuſing for this ſcene likewiſe thoſe of the greateſt propriety to explain it's intereſting ſenſe & meaning. He has indeed in this peice employ'd his whole force of art; & it is for colouring perhaps the beſt of his paintings; however ſuperior they, moſt undoubtedly, are to all others in this eſſential quality of the art.

The triumphal Carr is drawn by two Lions, emblems of ſtrength & of a generous courage. Upon it, Fame, unfolding her wings, is riſing from her ſeat to ſound the praiſes, & ſpread abroad the renown of the Heroe that lyes juſt deceas'd at her feet. The elegance of this figure, maintain'd even in death, is finely imagin'd to beſpeak your favor, & to shew the little pejoration even in form that is ſuffer'd bythoſe who dye deſerving Fame. No ſelf reproach or fear of death diſturbing their mind on the quitting this ſtage, the very features should evince its tranquillity, & they should appear as Hecuba, to her comfort, deſcribes the deceas'd Hector:

. . . . . freſh with ev'ry living grace,
No mark of pain, or violence of face;
Rosy & fair; as Phoebus' ſilver bow
Diſmiſs'd thee gently to the shades below. (Pope's translation)

The ſcripture with more elegance expreſſes this in the fewer words, *He slept with his fathers*.

Our Author has moſt ſagaciously introduc'd the inſtruments of Fame, by which she forms her Triumph. The Volume open at her ſeet & the Torſo on the ground, denote the means of Hiſtory & Sculpture by which her Heroe's perſon & actions are to be tranſmitted to poſterity. And this opens to him a rich ſcene in which the nine Muſes are introduc'd for a ſimilar purpoſe. Minerva is plac'd next the Carr to shew, that Wisdom muſt direct thoſe actions which the Muſes are to ſing. Bellona with her diſplay'd ſtandard takes the lead, as Emblem of that martial proweſs which moſt frequently enters in-

to

to the compoſition of the Heroe. By a very venial licence our Author has form'd as it were a tenth Muſe, to give a place to his art amongſt thoſe upon which the Triumph of Fame is rais'd; & a moſt conſpicuous, & elegant figure ſtands forwards in this character with a picture in her hand. the profile head with the red bonnet, is Virgil, whom, I ſuppoſe, as his fav'rite Poet, he has plac'd amongſt the Muſes.

The Heroes that have already merited & receiv'd her honors, are inroll'd in her records, &, as it were, have paſs'd the chair, are plac'd in a noble groupe behind the Carr. Philip is join'd to his ſon Alexander to maintain the equal claim of politics, with that of war, to heroiſm. And to shew that Philoſophy has alſo it's juſt pretenſions to like dignity; Plato, Ariſtotle, & other Sages, all known from their buſts or medals, come immediately behind theſe.

Armies are ſeen in the diſtant proſpect, to shew that military achievements have their title to Fame. And ſomewhat forwarder, at the head of Roman Legions, is the figure of Marcus Aurelius, taken from one of thoſe medals that were ſtruck on his entrance into a conquer'd Province. in theſe a ſuppliant Provincial, confeſſing on his knees the conqueſt, is always exhibited imploring mercy from the Emperor, who from on horſeback extends his arm, the known token of his taking them, as it were under the shadow of his wing, into protection. hence our Philoſophic Artiſt would inculcate this moral, „ that if the humbling the proud be one eſſential quality of a Heroe, „ the ſparing the ſubdu'd muſt compleat his character. And that „ true Fortitude could not conſiſt but with humanity.

Our Author has crown'd theſe honors with Elyſium. the rich grove in the back ground, into which fleeting shades may be obſerv'd, is intended to mark theſe abodes of happyneſs, in which our Heroes at the end of their career are to reſt from their labor.

Be it obſerv'd, that the impoſture of falſe names had moſt particularly diſguis'd, &, o'courſe, injur'd this divine performance. It is now left to ſpeak it's own plain tho moſt elegant ſenſe; beyond indeed whatever Painter, before our Author, had yet conceiv'd; & ſuch as muſt have originated, not only in the beſt ſchool of this expreſſive Art, but likewiſe in that of a true & moſt ſublime Philoſophy.

***

with which his Church would load it, withont violating that reſtraint which true religion may enforce.

Our Author has here, as before, in order to fill his peice with reſpectable figures, moſt happily compos'd this Triumph of our Religion from the ſeveral articles that are properly the foundation of it. The new Teſtament accordingly being built upon the old, the Patriarchs take the lead in this proceſſion. Amongſt theſe Noah has the model of an ark to diſtinguish him; David his inſtrument of muſic. behind theſe are the figures of Jacob & Eſau; the firſt with sleek, the latter with his hairy face. but the moſt conſpicuous figure is that of Abraham. As Faith is the very Baſis of our religion, the Scene opens therefore with the moſt exemplary inſtance of it in this Father of the faithfull; who with the butchering Knife in hand, is about to offer up, by God's order, his only begotten ſon Iſaac; the innocent Boy moſt chearfully carrying on his shoulder the fagot that is to burn him on the altar for an holocauſt. there is another propriety in this repreſentation to ſet out with; as this ſacrifice has been explain'd by ſome Fathers of the Church to be a Type of that greater victim our Author is about to celebrate the Triumph of.

Over theſe are repreſented our firſt Parents, with Moſes & Aaron, Joshua & one of the Judges bearing a Palm-branch in hand; all paſſing in the clouds to the boſom of the eternal Father, who in his glory, & with open arms is painted ready to receive them into the joy of their Lord.

Next follows the Croſs with a Sybil, her Prophetic leaf in hand, to shew that even the heathen Prophecies had confeſs'd this divine miſſion. The many figures that compoſe the groupe following the Croſs, I am at a loſs to name. but after comes a divine image of our Saviour ſeated in his Carr of Triumph, & diſpenſing heavenly benediction. The Carr is drawn by the Emblems of the four Evangeliſts; S. Mark's Lion, S. Luke's Bull, S. John's Eagle, & S. Matthew's Angel. A moſt Angelic figure, who with a slight ſtring almoſt looſe in his hand appears to make it follow with an eaſe, that ſeems afterward obſtructed, when the four Doctors of the Church are put to the Wheels. Theſe by their ſtraining poſtures give evident ſign of the difficulty with which the Carr proceeds under their direction. I make no doubt but that hereby our Author meant to ſignifye; That, under the purity of the doctrine ſet forth by the Evangeliſts, the Chriſtian Religion went on with more eaſe, than when the wheels were clogg'd by the dogmatical decretals of thoſe who are call'd the Doctors & Fathers of the Church.

Immediately after the Carr comes the Virgin with S. John Baptiſt, & the Apoſtles S. Peter & S. Andrew. The two Proto-Martyrs S. Stephen & S. Lawrence ſeem diſtinguish'd by the excellence of their figures as the firſt that gave evidence, even unto death, of that

firmneſs

firmneſs of faith, by which their Religion has triumph'd above all others.

Our Author would not entirely leave miracles withont his notice, ſince they too have contributed to this Triumph. but he has plac'd the Workers of them in the diſtant proſpect; plainly intimating that theſe were of a nature not too nearly to be look'd into. however to diſtinguish the quarter he had allotted them, S. Chriſtopher, with his ſize moſt miraculously increaſing in highth, to keep our ſaviour's feet dry, as the river he was to carry him over increas'd in depth, is choſen to exhibit as it were the ſign of this deparment.

In the fore ground our Author has illuſtrated, by a moſt maſterly exhibition of lovely Boys, in their amuſements, & embraces of brotherly love, the figure our Saviour himſelf uſes to expreſs the innocence & ſimplicity of his doctrine.

Bring little Children unto me, for of ſuch is the Kingdom of heaven.

***

At a diſtance, behind it, are two, that having eſcap'd shipwreck run with the utmoſt ſpeed from one death into the very jaws of another. before the Carr two others are likewiſe flying, as it were with horror, from this Triumphant ſpectre, & ſeem arriving at a bank that muſt ſtop them. by which is meant; that fly they ne'er ſo faſt, thô from the tardy beaſts that ever follow, they muſt be overtaken by them at laſt.

In the fore-ground are numbers of diſaſtrous deaths; on which this Triumph is moſt properly rais'd. Pyrrhus & Hector are known figures; the handſome youth near Hector, is probably Paris; the African in front, Jugurtha; the Pope with his triple crown, Alexander Borgia. but of many others, thô meant for known perſons, it muſt be ſome luckier gueſs that determines, without the Authors key. The figures, of Pyramus & of Thisbe, there can be no doubt of; any more than of the moral intended to be drawn from them; that even Love, thô given us as our ſupreme bleſſing, if unduly pursu'd without conſent of Parents, may be productive of diſaſtrous events. The moſt obſervable figures of Marc Antony & Cleopatra, tend likewiſe to illuſtrate a moral ſomewhat ſimilar. The invers'd Roman Enſign shews that to this delightfull ſeduction the Heroe had ſacrific'd his honors; & the eaſe with which he reclines in death on the beloved object, exhibits the fatal enchantment of this paſſion, in that He reſigns them contented, & thinks the world, for Love, not ill loſt.

IN

IN the life of Titian by Vaſari we read „ L' anno appreſſo 1508. „ mandò fuora Tiziano in iſtampa di legno il Trionſo della Fe- „ de, con infinità di figure, i primi Parenti, i Profeti, le Sibille, „ gl' Innocenti, gli Apoſtoli, e Gesù-Criſto in ſul trionfo, portato da' „ quattro Evangeliſti, e da' Dottori, co i Santi Confeſſori dietro. „ nella qual' opera moſtrò Tiziano tante finezze, bella maniera, e „ ſeppe tirarvi di grazie &c. &c. &c.

One might reſt aſſur'd from this paſſage that the above deſcrib'd pictures were the work of Titian; thò in the lives of the Venetian painters by Ridolfi we find that Bonifacio Veneto painted the four Triumphs of Petrarch; that the work was highly eſteem'd, & was then in England. Upon this a queſtion has been maliciously propagated, whether theſe paintings may not have had Bonifacio for their Author. A queſtion truly frivolous; & that cannot in the leaſt decide of their merit; which will be ever found in the work itself, & never in the author's name.

Be it obſerv'd by the by, that the eagerneſs which appears in many, who would paſs for conoiſſeurs, to make themſelves acquainted with the manner of Painters, that thence they may baptize the picture before them, tends greatly to defeat that judgment which they aim at the character of having. A ſimilar paſſion in the Artiſts themſelves has had like ill effects in the art it ſelf. I ſpeak of many who, with good talents to repreſent nature, have choſen to imitate the manner of ſome preceding Artiſt in vogue. Now it is very certain that what is call'd manner in the Painter, is actually his fault; in as much as by this he deviates from nature, that has none. Manner is indeed entirely excluded from the beſt performances of this art; in ſo much, that in the excellencies of the beſt Painters the Author is not to be diſtinguish'd; ſo nearly have they in theſe, by a maſterly imitation, approach'd to the uniformity of nature it ſelf. It is told of Cavalier Maſſimo that he reclaim'd his countrymen from that dirty & dark colouring, which the Neapolitan ſchool was running into by the imitation of Caravagio. He repreſented to Andrea Vaccari, in whom he ſaw good talents, & who was running headlong into this error, that if he ſuceeded he would gain no merit by it; ſince the merit of painting conſiſted only in a lively repreſentation of nature it ſelf. Vaccari profited by the advice, & thereby became, inſtead of a ſervile imitator, a painter above the common rate. it were well for our Conoiſſeurs that they met with a ſimilar monitor, to prevent their fixing their attention to the errors of the art, & from thence ſetting themſelves up for judges of it. it is from the obſervation of nature that the Judge as well as the Artiſt muſt be

form'd

form'd; & in this will the merit of every work conſiſt & not in the painters name.

To return to our paintings; it is of no importance (thô they are undoubtedly Titian's) to know their author. the beſt judges in the Univerſe have pronouc'd them more excellent performances (thô much in his ſtile) than any work that has yet been ſeen of Titian. Be it ſufficient to their praiſe to ſay, that no Painter (in any, now known, work) has compos'd with ſuch ſublimity of thought, or expreſs'd, with ſo much life & ſpirit, ſuch thoughts on canvaſs; that the colouring ſurpaſſes even the beſt of Titians works; and that, whoever may have been the author, theſe paintings have not their equals, And are worth every thing that four pictures can be valu'd at.